Still Human.

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Chapter 1 by anita edmunds

The numbers were right. There was something 'else'. Not something I had missed; more like something that I couldn't understand until it was done. So then why didn't it work? Obviously there was the fact that most of the scientific community thought it couldn't be done (and 50% of the rest of the population of the planet too). I wondered – not for the first time – if it really could be done only with a sentient being and that an inanimate object was doomed from the start, but that didn't feel right. I had two options, go back over the results check everything (which really was nothing!) or have another go. Well I chose the second option.

This time I placed a price of paper with the number 2 written on it into the chamber (taking out 'number 1' and discarding it in the bin). I set the time again for 10 seconds, sealed the chamber, checked the setting on the tablet and pressed the button. This time WAS different. I mean, it didn't look like it was different but I was absolutely sure that something had happened, that there was a flicker, it must have happened! Probably. Maybe?

Now I am very clever, I'm known for the shire amount of information I can recall, for the facts I can garnish any conversation with. However, despite my best efforts in recent years, common sense does not come naturally to me. I almost have to learn from my mistakes, and even then I still sometimes (often) get it wrong. I am aware of this flaw in my personality and yet when in the moment even though I say to myself to check it out, make sure it is common sense, what would a sensible person do? I fail completely and utterly to get the right answer; which is why I need a sidekick or a wingman if you like to temper my fits of genius. My current side kick Dave is very good at listening, follows me around all day giving me his undivided attention, works when I work, stops when I stop. Dave is extremely loyal and both understands and tolerates me. You

and an injection & I'm pretty sure he thinks differently about the event that I do. I won't forget my thought as I make a note of it on my tablet and it syncs with my 'not at work' tablet almost instantly. But in fact I can't quite get it off my mind. It is probable that I was thinking about while driving Dave home and it is possible that is why I had a little scrape in the car. It is unfortunate that this little scrape involved another car & another person. I will put your mind at ease – no one was hurt (Dave is fine) and there is actually no damage to either car. The inconvenience though of having to stop and talk to someone, when it wasn't part of my plan is a RRPITA, mostly because now, instead of going back to work in the lab, I have missed the sweet spot in the traffic, know that I can't get back without a much longer drive than is practical and that I will only have five minutes once there before the place closes. I want to get back to work, but a memo came around and about something I've since forgotten, someone whom I can't remember got the hump and now we are all 'working to rule'. It won't last, these things never do…it's like any new procedure or rule brought into place, everyone does it for two weeks while moaning about it, someone then delegates something to someone else because they have np choice at that time and before the month is out we're back to doing it the same way we used to. I really hope it's not just my work place that is like that.

So anyway, me & Dave are now going home, our evening is riveting interesting and holds nothing important for you to care about (food, tv/internet/reading/bit of housework/grocery shopping online/bath/bed). I think then instead I shall tell you about my employer. Willow Robertson is one of those super rich entrepreneurs, she made her money initially in an app she invented, moved on to some MMUD before selling both, then she was revolutionising online media things like movies and music and books…she made some money out of that but it was more about a change in the way people did things, in the end there wasn't really any money to be made. She brought out a number of failing bio-tech companies and then set up our 'office/base/campus' delete as applicable. He focus is on women in science technology and engineering. While that doesn't mean she goes in for positive discrimination, our site is run on job shares, flexible working patterns and we get two weeks of personal days in each year – which is basically random days off because a child is sick, or another dependant needs help with something. Our site is purpose built and from above looks like a question mark. The tip of the

anyway between the hours and contracts as well as the on-site childcare about 2/3 of the people who work here are women. But that's not the most interesting thing about Willow Robertson. What is interesting is that no one ever sees her in person. She holds meeting via video conferencing, he staff are on the end of intercoms and phones. Her publicity is pre-recorded or done digitally. Her parents both died before she was a teenager, her grand parents before she was born, no siblings, her father had an older brother from whom he was estranged so he & his family have never met her. It is documented that Willow Robertson has a fear of personal contact (apparently it's some kind of real phobia). However it is sporadically suggested that she is not real, that she is some kind of computer fabrication, an A.I. of sorts ... but these whispers soon fade as she has never shown any glitch, copes with unpredicted behaviours and events and has passed every variant of the Enhanced Turin Test many times over. Every so often those they re-emerge.

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I spend most of the night trying not to think about my plan of action and trying to get to sleep. Dave sleeps on the bed with me and is a little miffed at all of my tossing and turning. I make swift work of my morning ebloutions and Dave and I arrive about 20 minutes early for work, which is about normal. I have a cup of tea in the common room and get a free lemon water and an apple for me and small pack of digestive biscuits to share with Dave. I chat briefly with the others starting at the sameish time as me, as well as some of the lunch time crew, finally I say goodnight to the chap who always goes home about now so that he can do the school run.

After what seems like an eternity, but is actually about 16 hours after I left & about 16 hours and 1 minute after my idea I am ready to go. Well nearly ready to go...I forgot to get the thing I needed most! Only me! I go to the stores on the first floor and get two matching tablets. One back in my lab I set them up both exactly the same as each other. I set the time & a timer, #I set both of the timers to start running when the network time reaches the hour and to keep on running. So now I'm ready to go. I tape a note to the back of each tablet (A & B) and place 'B' in the chamber, seal it, set it for 10 seconds, check my tablet (the work one that has all the software and settings on it) and press the button. With the moving display on the tablet and the clear door to the chamber it is clear to see that it has worked. The timer has lost 10 seconds

few other things before I can celebrate! I have to decide what way to go. Firstly I am going to repeat exactly the same thing…B now has lost 20 seconds on A! Next I decide to stick to 10 seconds but to rush the 'faffing' I am done in five seconds…but this time, as I open the chamber I take out a B that is 30 seconds behind A and then place my B in the chamber, where it vanishes…! Right ok, this is going to get confusing.

Smu, was struggling today. Everything that could go wrong had gone wrong. It started with a chip failure…Which happens when you skim around the edges of legality and mod your ROMS. What is not usual is a 90% failure of all your chips at the same time. Smu was an early adaptor, she had inherited some faulty genes from her mum, and so at just a few months old, her parents had agreed to have implanted a chip into each eye which in time would help to override her blindness, giving her time to learn to see before she started school. There had been an 'upgrade' aged 10, which had caused a bit of a freak-out until she had got used to the dramatic difference, but the original chip had stayed in, just turned off. At 13 Smu had read about modding and downloaded her first homebrew ROM. Now she had a built in heads up display! Text and basic images from the web and other wireless system could be played inside her head (inside her eyes!) Without anyone knowing. This had catapulted her education…and that of a few others in the same boat as her (many of whom she 'knew'). Five years later there had been uproar, claims of cheating, interfering with God and riots in the street. But by then it was too late…Soon after the mod came and under the skin implant in her ear to pick up and enhance and sometimes crack in to wireless systems for an 'always on' connection. She had the standard RFID tag … and another one with another ID, due to a planned problem at install (she even had a third in a box for an emergency, never used). Her vision had left her other senses behind so she had augmentation chips for hearing and smell implanted, which was a bit of a fad at the time, but by this time Smu knew where she was going. The human race was changing and Smu while not leading the way, was very much an early adaptor. She had a solid state hard drive in each arm and customised voice activation for her home CPU so she could walk around her house and dictate and edit document and store them inside herself.

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